THE BATTLE FOR LIGHT

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A. W. BLAXALL

AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y., 10011

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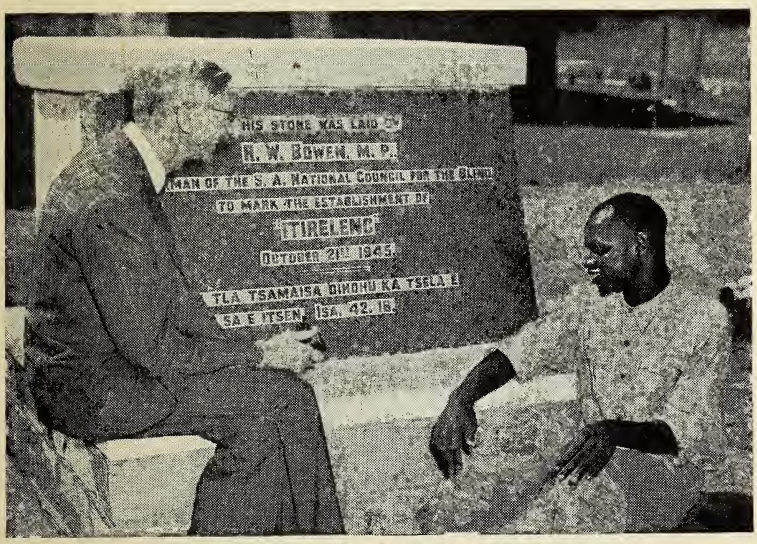
THE BATTLE for LIGHT



A BLIND SHANGAAN ENJOYS A CHAT WITH THE REV. A. W. BLAXALL.

A record of work during the years 1937—1947, with proposals for development in the various fields of service: The prevention of blindness; education and training of the blind, and their employment; welfare services, and other activities which have proved necessary to relieve suffering and encourage independence

Issued by the Transvaal Society for the care of Non-European Blind, P. O. Box 42, Roodepoort.

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MORIJA PRINTING WORKS
MORIJA, BASUTOLAND
1947

EZENZELENI ITIRELENG

PALMER HOSTEL

DEAF-BLIND AFRICANS WITH THEIR ATTENDANT, SHADRACK MOKHUDI, AND Mrs. BLAXALL

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

The Battle for Light

We start our story at :—

No. 77 Gerty Street,
SOPHIATOWN
Date : October, 1937.

TWO HOUSES are on this stand : one, about 30 years old, well built with 4 good sized rooms ; the other, a smaller cottage recently completed.

I was busy directing cleaning operations because the larger house was to be used to accommodate half-a-dozen blind men anxious to be trained to do something useful in life. The cottage was to house myself, a Coloured instructor (himself blind), and a house-keeper.

"There is a blind man at the door," said the house-keeper, handing me a letter in an official envelope.

"Good heavens," I thought, "surely they are not arriving before we are ready!" The envelope contained a letter from the Magistrate at Kroonstad saying that the bearer, Jonas Mokeretla, was the blind youth concerning whom we had had correspondence while I was still in charge of the Athlone School in the Cape. Unfortunately Jonas was 22 years old, just too old for the school, one of many whose pleading applications led me to decide to leave the school in the hands of an educationalist in order to open a training institution.

"Bring Jonas in," I said, and in a few minutes found myself confronted with a short thick-set African clothed in a motley of rags. Fortunately he spoke a little Afrikaans.

"Have you travelled alone ?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

"So you can see a little." He miled wanly.

"I can just see the light and shapes of things if they are big."

"What have you been doing at Kroonstad ?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and replied : "Nothing, my friends have helped me, but I want to work."

"You look strong, Jonas" I said, "But we are not ready to start teaching you basketry. If you like you can stay and help us clean the houses."

Jonas stayed and worked like a trooper. In due course training began. Jonas was enterd No. 1 on the register. Today, nearly 10 years after, he is the top grade worker in our Hamanskraal workshop, married and with a useful amount saved in the Post Office.

This morning, March 10th, 1947, Cerrus Kola arrived from Pietersburg and was duly entered No. 138 in the register ; three more are expected in a day or two, bringing our number up to 141.

This brochure will review the work of the intervening years and give some estimate of the tasks which still lie ahead. Behind it lies a story it is difficult to tell : the neglect of many years ; lives spent in idleness which might have been useful ; and then the efforts of a few pioneers to repair the years of wastage for those still youngish and to open centres of hope for the future.

The first attempt to assist Non-European blind people was made over 20 years ago, when a group of people under the chairmanship of Adv. R. W. Bowen, M.P., decided to open a school for Non-European blind children. The school was opened by the Earl of Athlone, Governor-General of the Union, on the 6th of May, 1927. Since then 380 children have been admitted, of whom a large number are now usefully employed and happy with their families. 1947 started with 190 children at this school, of whom 50 are from the Transvaal. In the years ahead these children will look to our Society for employment together with those we ourselves are training, so that it is safe to say that before another 10 years have passed this Society will be easily the largest organization caring for the blind in the Union of S.A. That has been made possible by great generosity on the part of a comparatively small number of people aided by government subsidy, which, we are glad to say, has been progressively generous. Reference will be made to all these facts, but the chief matter of interest is the way in which the initial effort to provide education for blind children has developed into a network of services, the most out-standing of which has been the establishment of the first preventorium to combat blindness in S. Africa. Prevention is obviously priority No. 1 in any social service, but the human aspect must not be forgotten : the misery endured by

those already incurably blind through no fault of their own. They too are human beings with the same feelings and emotions as their fellows possessed with sight—we must give them their chance. Most of this brochure will be concerned with their welfare.

The basis of our 1947 work must be to build up a substantial capital fund from which allocations can be made for all the different services we are already providing, and for others still waiting to be tackled. It is a challenge to us who value the priceless gift of sight.

EZENZELENI

By the end of 1937 the old house in Sophiatown was a hive of activity. It was impossible to pack in more than ten blind men who were busy learning to make baskets under the direction of their blind instructor, Mr. Christian Pretorius, (since deceased). Many others were pleading for the chance, as for example Hebron Sokela who, having become blind at the age of 16 when just about to finish Standard VI in a small Natal school, was plunged in despair. During the Christmas holidays 1937 a friend from Johannesburg went home to Natal and told Hebron (then about 21 years old) that he had seen blind men working in a house in Sophiatown. Knowing nothing about application forms etc. etc., Hebron himself appeared at No. 77, Gerty Street, and said he wanted to learn. Of course he was not refused, with the result that to-day he is a happy married man working in the Cawston Workshop for Blind Africans just outside Durban. To his great joy his wife recently presented him with a son who has been named Mehlokayise (his father's eyes). Again, the case reported by a friend in the Eastern Transvaal—sore eyes which had been treated by a witch-doctor with disastrous results. Yet again, the blind young women in Payneville near Springs who, having lost one eye years before, had the misfortune to fall in the crowded kitchen of her house, and hitting the corner of the stove in her fall lost the other eye. So it quickly became clear that larger premises were needed, and the search began.

By the middle of 1938 it was decided that the best proposition the committee had seen was a small farm on the northern outskirts of Roodepoort —a portion of the famous Wilgespruit farm on which the Struben Brothers are reputed to have found gold. The small

section for sale was rocky, with very little water and only one old dilapidated house, but it was cheap, as things go on the Reef. So negotiations began in the wearisome way which will be described later on. The public were approached for financial assistance and responded generously as will be also described in another paragraph. Thus it came about that in June, 1939, Dr. Bernard Price, O.B.E., laid the foundation stone of the first section of a building scheme, to comprise hostels, workshops and staff quarters for 48 blind men and 24 blind women.

A good supply of water was found which gave confidence to the organizers, but an adequate system of storage and distribution has yet to be established. Alas, the property is too far from Roodepoort Municipal township to have electricity which is a serious handicap, especially in the medical and surgical work at the preventorium.

At that time it was thought that many years would elapse before large numbers would come under the care of the Society, actually there has never been a time when there was not a long waiting list. Then broke out the great world struggle with all its repercussions on the work of this centre. But the public of the Transvaal and neighbouring districts have been very generous, with the result that three quarters of the scheme has now been completed. The records show : number admitted to date : 138 men and 33 women. Of these 13 had had previous education at the Athlone School and so were at once given employment. Four of these are ex-servicemen whose training we undertake in co-operation with St. Dunstan's Society. Six men have had to be returned to their homes as untrainable and seven left of their own accord. Three men have had to be sent home for disciplinary reasons, and four men are now working in their homes, under the direction of the Society. At present we have 31 employed on a wage basis with 39 men and 18 women still in training.

While the friends of our Society may feel that this is a satisfactory result for ten years work, we must not lose sight of the fact that in the Transvaal alone there are approximately 7,000 blind Africans of whom (at a conservative estimate) 300–400 are young enough to be trained. In addition there are the whole of the Orange Free State and the North Western areas of the Cape from which we constantly receive applications for assistance.

Whilst in training men are encouraged to learn Braille, typewriting and such other interests as are likely to be useful to them in

future life. The main work is craft instruction, basketry and mattress-making for the men, and various forms of knitting for the women. Our plan is to introduce brush and broom-making for both men and women at an early date.

Music takes a large place in the life of all African people, and specially of the blind. There are several choirs in the Institution, and plans are afoot to start a small orchestra. The training centre is not under any particular church, and ministers of all denominations are welcome to make such arrangements as they wish for the spiritual needs of their members. Prayers are held every evening, attendance being voluntary. In short the life of Ezenzeleni is planned as far as possible to help the blind to forget their blindness and live and work happily. To deny that there are any difficulties would be foolish. But at the same time "problems" are kept in proportion and every effort is made to secure normality.

ITIRELENG.

A blind man of average ability takes three years to become a qualified basket-maker. Anyone even slightly acquainted with African life will realize that those who came to Ezenzeleni in the early days varied greatly, and while some completed the course in three years several required a fourth, and some even a fifth year to reach the stage of efficiency necessary for wage earning. But even five years pass quickly, so it came about that in the early forties the committees were confronted with the task of providing employment for a number of their own men, and some who were returning home to the Transvaal after having completed education and training in the Athlone School.

Had they been Europeans, or even Coloured workers, the position would not have been so difficult. They could have lived wherever they wished in the suburbs of Johannesburg, and gone to work daily. More than one expressed the hope of early marriage with the consequent desire for a home. Difficult as it appeared to establish them, it had to be remembered that this was the object of the Society in training them, namely, that they might establish homes, support them by their own labour, and lead normal lives.

A suggestion was made that the Society purchase one of the factory sites offered for sale by the Roodepoort Municipality. Here it was maintained, a modernized factory could be built while the workers

would be provided with cottages at Ezenzeleni, and be conveyed to work daily. But the proposal did not meet with the approval of the majority on the Board of Management. Such a scheme it was contended, would not be within the framework of South Africa's Native policy. There was considerable difference of opinion on this matter but in the end it was decided to approach the Department of Native Affairs asking for the use of a Trust Farm for the purpose of establishing workshops and homes for trained blind men. Several farms, and other expropriated buildings were offered to the Society, half-a-dozen being visited and inspected. Distance from a railway station, and other practical difficulties, led to the refusal of all. At last the Department informed the Society that the Trust had acquired a very large farmhouse 2 miles from Hamanskraal station, 25 miles north of Pretoria. This was offered to the Society and accepted. In August 1943 the first group of blind workers, three being married men with families moved into the farmhouse which was renamed *Itireleng*, the Sotho equivalent of *Ezenzeleni* (Zulu for "the place where one works for oneself").

As usual the initial work was strenuous, and in this case was complicated by the distance from the headquarters of the Society, by shortage of staff and the wartime difficulties which attended every building effort. However, the scheme went ahead. Outbuildings were reconstructed to serve as a workshop, five small cottages were built for married workers, followed by five more the next year. All the time the Committee were beset by financial difficulties which it would be wearisome to describe in detail in this brochure.

This much must at any rate be said : The Society undertook this social service within the framework of the Native Land and Trust Act, being under the impression that as the preamble to that Act states it shall be a responsibility of the Trust to develop social services for the Native people, so the community side (provision of cottages and amenities) would be built at the cost of the Trust.

Unfortunately the hope proved groundless, the legal advisors of the Government ruling that such a centre for blind Africans came under the general provisions of the Blind Person's Act in spite of the fact that the ground itself could never become the property of any registered Blind Society. In other words, our Society found itself in exactly the same position financially as it would have been if the work had all been built up at Roodepoort only, with

the obvious advantages of central control, larger community organization and the various amenities so important to an Institution.

However, the Itireleng scheme has now become an accomplished fact, and the Society feel they must continue with it. The community at the time of writing consists of :—

10 married men with families living in cottages.
6 married men with families living in tents or other temporary accommodation.
10 unmarried men living in the old farmhouse.

In July 1947 another half dozen men at Ezenzeleni will complete their courses, but where will they be accommodated ? Even if room can be found for them in houses there is the matter of workshop space. The present workshop is quite full, so that to put any more workers in will mean spoiling the work itself, which is obviously undesirable.

The Management Committee have now decided that as they cannot build up all their work at Roodepoort it will be better to make a clean division. An important memorandum on the whole subject of blind welfare work for non-Europeans in the Transvaal has been written and presented to the Government authorities. In brief it plans for a large centre for all branches of men's work at Itireleng, leaving Ezenzeleni for women and prevention work. As several departments are concerned it is probable that sometime will elapse before approval, with promise of adequate subsidy, will be received for the various suggestions. The scheme will require an outlay of at least £25,000.

PALMER -ALEXANDER HOSTEL.

"Prevention is better than cure"—and yet how seldom is it practised. In almost every branch of Social Service the cry is heard "If only . . . so-and-so . . . had been dealt with earlier, this situation would never have arisen". And yet nothing is done for scores of others who are still "becoming" blind, to save them before it is too late.

Again and again we found ourselves up against tragedies like these :— A young man in the early twenties totally blind from a disease which could have been arrested when he was twelve. A youth in his late teens, head drooping with the dejected air of one who has

been a burden to himself and others all his life—"Opthalmia neonatorum" says the doctor shaking his head, and of course everyone now knows that it is only a drop of prophylactic in the eyes of the newly born babe that is needed to banish the dreaded terrors which produced so many blind babies in days gone by. Then there was the girl, or young woman (about 23 years of age), from Sophiatown who was rushed to the non-European hospital screaming with pain because someone during a melee in the yard had thrown a bottle of caustic soda—a smashing blow and then a burning pain in eyes and cheeks, and thenceforward everlasting darkness. Of course such an accident should never occur, but . . . well, it is no good crying over that which cannot be recovered, but the chances of such occurances in the future can be combated by a vigorous campaign to prevent blindness.

It was a germ of an idea, encouraged to growth by the experience of other countries. The first thing needed—data : vital statistics, whatever you like to call them. In simple language, "a few plain facts". A willing opthamologist in Johannesburg was found and a tour of four villages in the Rustenburg area arranged. 350 cases of potential blindness were examined in two days, 157 of whom would be sightless in a few years if not treated immediately. An analysis of this very limited survey was read to a meeting of the National Council for the Blind in Durban in 1939. At the same meeting a senior official of the Department of Native Affairs read a paper giving alarming figures of the number of blind Africans coming forward to claim the miserable pittance, called a pension, of 10/- a month. Result—a strong resolution that the Government be approached to do something about it. Gentle reader, have you ever negotiated with Government Departments ? It is not saying anything unkind, or making caustic criticism of those who labour under many difficulties, but the lapse of time between the realization of a need, and the creation of formulae to meet it, seems fixed at many weary years. And in the meanwhile many are going blind, as is evidenced by the fact that new applications for blind pensions are being registered by the Native Affairs Department at the rate of 200 a month. Short of funds as our Society has always been, it was nevertheless decided to deal with as many cases as could be persuaded to come for treatment. A cottage near Ezenzeleni was hired and a new department of work started. Always packed to over-flowing and working under conditions as far re-

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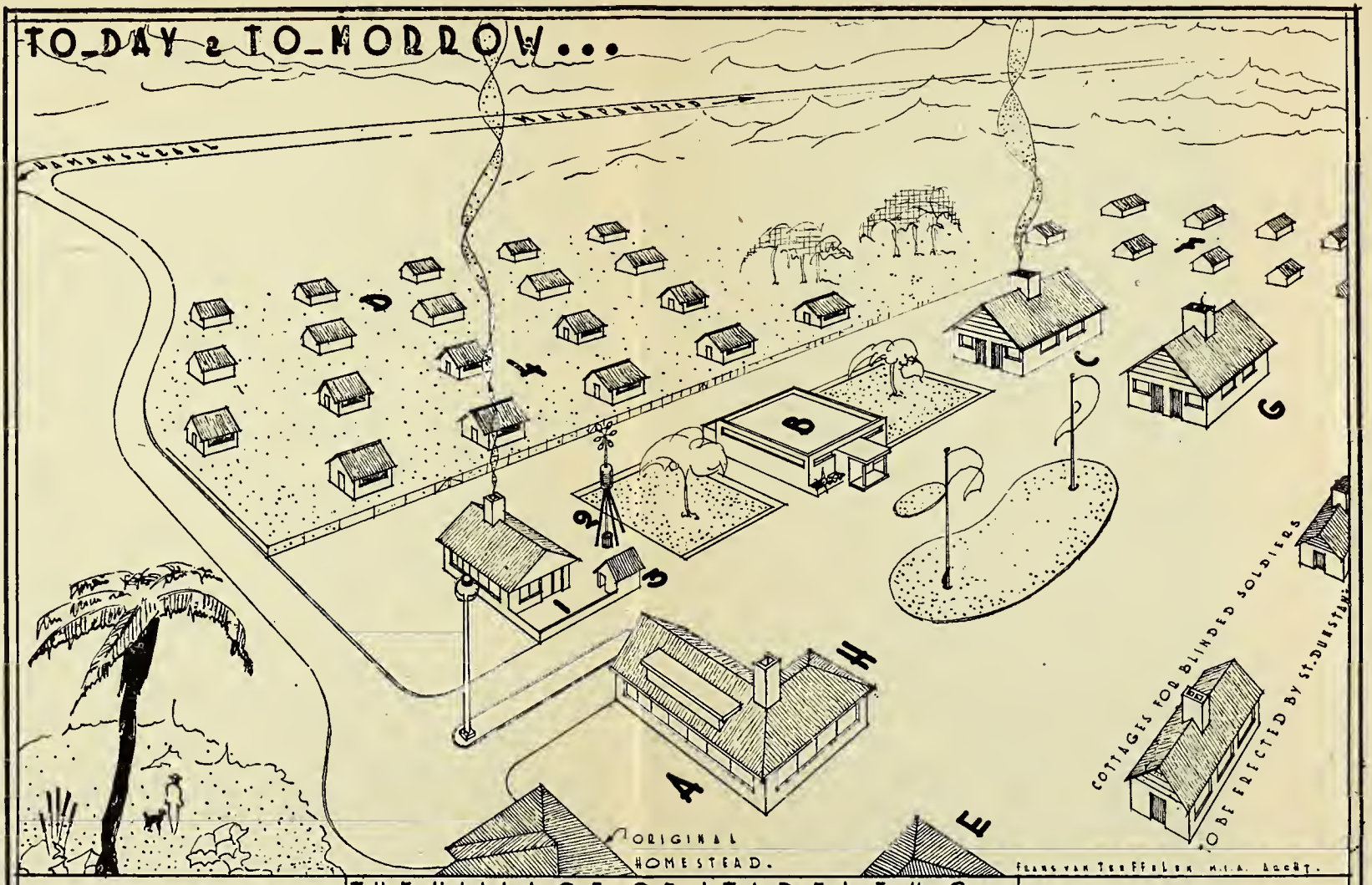
TO-DAY & TO-MORROW...



SKETCH PLAN | THE VILLAGE OF ITIRELENG. | BIRD'S EYE VIEW.

LEGEND

EXISTING BUILDINGS, ETC.	IMMEDIATE REQUIREMENTS	NEAR FUTURE:
1: WORKSHOP.	A: WORKSHOP & STORES	E: HOME FOR THE AGED & INFIRM.
2: BOREHOLE.	B: COMMUNITY HALL & WASH-HOUSES	F: MORE COTTAGES.
3: STORE (very small).	C: HOSTEL FOR 24 BACHELORS.	G: ANOTHER BACHELOR HOSTEL.
4: 10 COTTAGES.	D: ADDITIONAL COTTAGES.	H: WORKSHOP EXTENSION.
£ 3000.-.-	£7000.-.-	£13000.-.-

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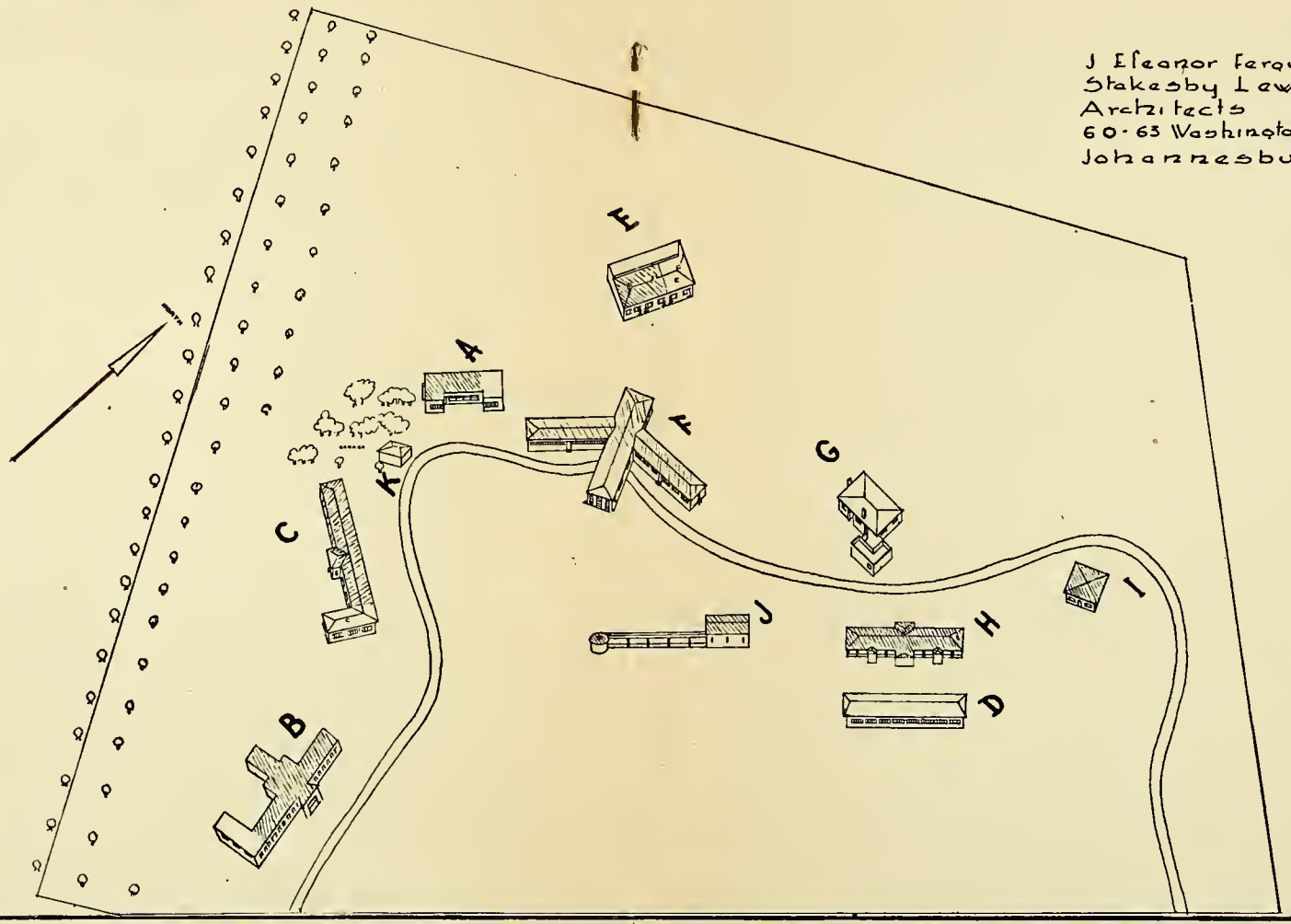


PROPOSED NEW BUILDINGS FOR THE TRANSVAAL SOCIETY FOR THE CARE OF NON-EUROPEAN BLIND ROODEPOORT.

LEGEND

EXISTING BUILDINGS VALUE: £17.000 FUTURE BUILDINGS ESTIMATED COST £13,000.

A: CENTRAL STORE: B: ADDITIONAL WARD TO PALMER HOSTEL: C: MATTRESS & BROOM SHOP: D: CRAFTROOM FOR WOMEN
E: STAFF ROOMS: F: RECREATIONAL HALL & LIBRARY: G: HOUSE FOR SUPERINTENDENT: H: HOSTEL FOR WOMEN: :
I: STAFF COTTAGE: J: STAFF RONDAVEL & CHAPEL: K: GARAGE: : :

moved from modern hospitalization as Jupiter is from the Morning Star, the cottage eye-hospital struggled on, with a daily average of patients nearly 50% above bed accommodation (the number of beds is 24, the daily average of inmates throughout 1946 was 33). With their usual quick grasp of the essentials in a worthwhile job the Chamber of Mines offered £1,000 towards the erection of a special building, and £200 p.a. towards its maintenance. Thus it came about that in June 1944 the Palmer-Alexander Hostel for the care of the eyes was officially opened, having cost £4,000 to build and equip. After two years of inter-departmental negotiations and correspondence from our office which fills several files, direct appeal from three members of Parliament to the Minister of Health produced a grant of £2,000.

Two wards of 12 beds each, quarters for two nurses, dining room etc. with an operating theatre constituted the first unit to be established in South Africa for the specific work of saving sight. Since then 536 patients have been treated; 460 have gone home cured; 36 were beyond treatment; 9 blind children were sent to the Athlone School and 14 young adults transferred to Ezenzeleni.

Inevitably much publicity has attended this venture, named after two noble sisters, Mrs. Palmer and Mrs. Alexander, who did so much to establish the work in its early days. With a natural pride we feel in some way responsible for two events full of significance for the future of eye health in South Africa: (a) The establishment of a Bureau for the Prevention of blindness as part of the National Council for the Blind and (b) the undertaking by the Order of St. John in South Africa to establish near Johannesburg a fully equipped Eye Hospital after the pattern of their famous hospital in Jerusalem which has worked for centuries. Wonderful as these two events are we still believe that our pioneer unit will be needed for many years to come.

The ramifications of eye diseases are very wide and cannot be combated by medical attention only. Proper dieting to overcome the effects of malnutrition, education in general hygiene, pre- and post-maternity work, all these services must be integrated into African life. The Palmer Hostel, as it is now generally called, is almost entirely African-run and has won the confidence of the people. There is no need to look for patients, they arrive from all parts at all hours—as many as 50 have arrived at one time.

So funds will be needed to extend the premises and improve the

conditions under which the work is done. It is no exaggeration to say that every penny of £5, 000 will easily be spent for all these purposes. "Whereas I was blind, now I see"—it is still possible to hear these words from grateful people. We have not the power to perform the miracle by a single command, but we can at any rate use the forces at our disposal and in time produce the same result.

GENERAL WELFARE WORK

We have started this review of ten years' work with the story of our institutional work because its appeal is concrete in the public mind, but it must not be imagined that the Society is only concerned with those who came within the walls of Ezenzeleni, Itireleng and the Palmer Hostel.

The true story is that when 77 Gerty Street was opened in 1937 the Society was already two years old. Constituted in 1935 it performed a yeoman service under the Chairmanship of Col. M. C. Rowland C.M.G. who was followed by Mrs. E. O. Lake, widow of a Mayor of Johannesburg, the memory of whose interest in African Welfare is perpetuated by Orlando, the vast township named after him.

During those two years a number of blind people, Coloured, Indian and African were assisted in various ways. Children were sent to the Athlone School and adults were given financial help until pensions became available in 1937.

Since then the work of the Society has always embraced general Welfare Work, while adhering to the main principle of encouraging blind people in self-help. Relief is given in cases of emergency and sickness, but, in general, cases of distress are linked up with agencies responsible for such assistance.

There is one branch of blind welfare work we have hardly touched namely Home Teaching. People who have the misfortune to lose their sight in middle life usually do not want to go to an Institution to be re-trained in reading, writing and some profitable handwork, they prefer to learn at home. To be of any use a Home Teacher should visit the newly blinded persons at least weekly and even twice a week at the beginning. Among the people we serve there are large numbers who become blind at 40 to 50 years of age, but, alas, very few have had any education or done work other than general labouring. Now and again we meet an educated African,

a former teacher, clerk or other person engaged in work which is lost with the onset of blindness, leaving with him a real desire to be re-educated. We have taught a little Moon type to a few such people, but the difficulty has always been distance, and inconvenience of travel. To visit Alexandra, or Orlando township is very difficult for an African Welfare Officer without his own transport, and in the townships themselves the distances to be walked are enormous.

Since 1945 we have had the services of a trained Welfare Officer graduate from the Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work, but Home Teaching and Welfare Work for the blind is a special branch of that science so that it is only now we are beginning to deal with the problem, the first task being the compilation of a register of non-European blind people on the Reef. When it is remembered that every Reef town has a large African township and Johannesburg has several, it will be realized that it will take time to make personal contact with the thousand and more blind persons of all ages, and stages of culture, who are scattered throughout these areas.

Several progressive Municipalities have Welfare Workers of their own and, where this is the case, our task is greatly lightened because they help to find the ones capable of benefitting by Home Teaching.

FINANCE

We now come to part of the work which naturally falls under two heads :—

(a) The support of the general public.

(b) Government grants.

As the latter is nearly always dependent on the former let us review our experience during the past ten years in that order.

The Subscribing Public have always responded most generously to any appeals made on behalf of the blind, but when the field is that of non-European life it is surprising how varied are the reactions. Some individuals, and public bodies, are especially interested in African Welfare, others find it difficult to make any response.

We owe a great debt of gratitude, for substantial donations, to the S.A. National Council for the Blind ; Bantu Welfare Trust, founded by Col. Donaldson; the Chamber of Mines; Johannesburg, Roodepoort and Krugersdorp Municipalities and a few individuals who

would not wish their names to be mentioned. But the backbone of our support comes from the regular annual subscriptions of ten shillings, a guinea and so on. At present we have just over 350 regular annual subscribers which means that a very determined effort must be made to increase the number if a really adequate income is to be assured.

Annual street collections are a valuable source of income and we cannot adequately express our gratitude to the ladies who year by year take their stand and help us in this way.

The most disappointing aspect of general support is the comparatively small response from country areas. In spite of the fact that the majority of those trained at Ezenzeleni, and almost all the patients in the Palmer Hostel, come from country districts, grants, or permissions to hold collections are refused. The excuse often given is that local collections are only permitted for local charities—perhaps the best thing will be to start country branches of our Society by whom all local cases would be dealt with and suitable candidates passed on to Ezenzeleni or the Palmer Hostel. From Pietersburg area we have at present twelve men and two women in training, with another seven in full employment at *Itireleng*; in addition to these numbers of children and adults (in one case a whole family) have been successfully treated and returned home saved from blindness. If we can start a local branch in such an area it will surely be difficult for the local authority to refuse some form of monetary assistance.

We cannot leave the subject of financial support without a very special reference to the many African Schools and Churches which send their gifts. Year by year the Anglican Mission Schools on the Reef have given their lenten savings to our work, varying from a few shillings from a one-teacher school to several pounds from a larger school. The American Board Mission, the Methodist women and friends of the African Methodist Episcopal Church have been generous supporters. We are tempted to say it would be a fine thing if all African Schools and Churches would set aside a Sunday a year to remember the needs of their less fortunate brethren.

Government subsidy comes to us from different departments for various branches of the work which it may be of interest to enumerate.

(a) *The Department of Social Welfare* administers the Blind Person's Act, No. 11 of 1936. When we opened our centre in Sophiatown

we applied for subsidy under the provisions of section 9 of that Act. The first reply was to the effect that as Natives were excluded from the registration embodied in section 2 of the Act they were also not covered by section 9. The obvious next step was to write to the Department of Native Affairs to ask if they had money at their disposal for such a venture, but this only drew another negative reply. Then we asked the National Council to ask which Government department has the responsibility of helping Africans who are blind but wish to be useful. In due course, that is after the lapse of a few months, the reply was received that notwithstanding anything in section 2, section 9 made no reference to race or colour therefore it covered all institutions for the blind. From that time we have been duly recognised and receive equal treatment to that received by institutions for other races, with the inevitable difference in salary scales and rates of wage augmentation.

We would like to place on record our appreciation of the way in which the Secretary for Social Welfare and the officials of his Department, are always ready to consider any proposals placed before them. We realize that when they have to refuse assistance (as for example when they informed us that the provision of Transport is not covered by the term maintenance of Institutions in the Act) they are generally carrying out the instructions of their legal advisors, and not expressing their own views. The same applies to the trying fact that all returns must be made on such complicated forms, blanks for which are not provided by the Department. The personnel of the Department—overworked as they usually are—have always been helpful and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

(b) *The Department of Native Affairs* used to be solely responsible for what were known as pensions to blind Africans, but which were actually relief grants administered by a special vote of Parliament. This procedure was necessary because, as stated elsewhere, Section 2 of the Blind Person's Act, No. 11 of 1936, was originally only for European and Coloured persons. In 1945 the Act was amended so that all blind people of all races now come under its provisions with pension rates £60 p. a. for Europeans ; £30 p.a. for Coloured and Indian people ; and for Africans £12 p.a. in urban areas, £9 p.a. in country districts and £6 p.a. in the reserves. In all cases there are means tests. Nevertheless the administration was left with the Native Affairs Department who have tackled an enormous job with great thoroughness, making every effort within the framework of the law to meet cases of

hardship. If from time to time our Society has felt it necessary to criticise the wide differentiation on the basis of colour, it does not in any way imply criticism of the officials with whom we have always had most cordial relations.

In the section of our work devoted to preventive services centred round the Palmer Hostel, officials of the Native Affairs Department have shown the utmost sympathy and done all in their power to encourage potential blind people to take advantage of the facilities by providing free rail warrants for patients and escorts when recommended by the district surgeon.

But it has been in connection with the Itireleng Workshop and village at Hamanskraal that we have had most contact by the comprehensive memorandum dealing with development during the next five years. Details of our proposals will be found in the plans at the end of this pamphlet.

(c) *The Union Health Department* seemed to us the right body to ask for financial assistance when it was decided to undertake preventive services as described above. As usual the first reply started "it is much regretted that . . .". Apparently there is abundant legislation in connection with the health of the people but in no existing Act was provision made to prevent people from becoming ill. Discussing the proposed new Palmer Hostel for the care of the eyes with Mr. R. W. Bowen M. P. (himself a blind man) he remembered that the Blind Person's Act, section 9 speaks of Institutions "for the blind and partially blind". So off we went to the Department of Social Welfare, armed with a carefully prepared memorandum as to the number of persons already saved from blindness, a plan of the new hostel, and so on. Our reception was most cordial and a few weeks later an interesting event happened; a high official of that Department arrived at Ezenzeleni quite unofficially, but in spite of the lateness of his visit he refused to leave until he had been taken to see the cottage used for the children under treatment and the site of the proposed hostel. Hopes rose high only to be dashed to the ground again a few months later when the formal reply was received, "it is regretted that our legal advisors say the proposed hostel for the treatment of eye cases does not come within the provisions of the Blind Person's Act. It is suggested that your Society apply to the Provincial Authorities who are responsible for hospitalisation". We took a deep breath and did more than apply, we invited his Honour the Administrator to address the next annual general

meeting. The long awaited speech was full of expressions of profound sympathy for blind people, and admiration of the courageous way they learned to work and so on. Reference was then made to the efforts of the Society to prevent people going blind, and we were informed that a Commission then sitting was busy preparing a scheme for a full national health service which would embrace units like the proposed Palmer Hostel, which at present were not attached to a recognised hospital and so could not be financially assisted by his Administration.

Fortunately the member of Parliament for Roodepoort Mr. F. B. Allen took up the matter and when the estimates of the Department for Public Health were under discussion he conferred with Mr. R. W. Bowen M.P. and Mrs. M. Ballinger M.P. and then asked from the floor of the House whether the Minister of Health was aware of the small unit in his constituency engaged in preventing people from becoming blind, and to what extend they are assisted. The Minister replied that his Department was aware of the work and invited his friend the Hon. member for Roodepoort, to discuss it with him in his office. Taking his two coleagues Mr. Allen called on the Minister with the result that a capital grant of £2,000 was squeezed into the estimates, and a promise made to provide £250 p.a. towards the maintenance of the hostel, which amount has since been increased to £400. In all these matters what is so difficult is that funds must always be available so that the work can be started, buildings erected and so on, while the Government authorities are making up their minds whose duty it is, and under what particular formula a piece of work can be assisted. It is for this reason that a charitable organization invariably lives by the kindness of the bank in providing overdraft facilities.

I cannot close this section without a strong appeal to friends who are able to do so to make provision in their wills for a bequest to work of this nature. A really substantial capital fund would enable the Society to proceed with its schemes to meet the need of our blind people without the constant anxiety as to whether or not the money will be forthcoming.

By-Products. The purpose of this brochure is to review the work of the last ten years and to set before our friends the programme which must be faced in the next ten years, so far as we can see it. At the same time it is interesting to notice a number of other social services

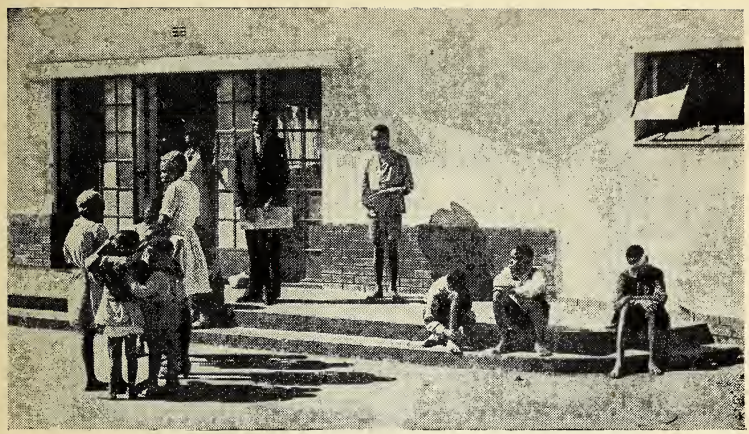
which have been stimulated by our efforts—in some ways they are by-products of work for the blind.

(1) *Kutlwanong Deaf and Dumb School.* In the very early days, while still at Sophiatown, I was frequently called to the Pass Office, or the office of the Native Commissioner, to help untangle a case of an uneducated deaf-mute without papers of any sort, or any indications as to whence he came or whither he hoped to go. In spite of experience with the deaf and dumb covering more than a third of a century, I still find the natural signing of an African deaf-mute far from easy to follow—it is easy to misunderstand some signs and so get off into an entirely wrong track. In such difficulties I usually call in the help of an educated deaf person thoroughly skilled in the manual language. I shall always remember the pantomime which took place in a room at the Bantu Refuge, near Germiston, one Sunday afternoon nearly 10 years ago. During the previous week I had spent some hours with the dark-skinned silent gesticulating youth whose bewilderment shone through his eyes. But I gathered little more than that he lived on a farm and was lost in Johannesburg!

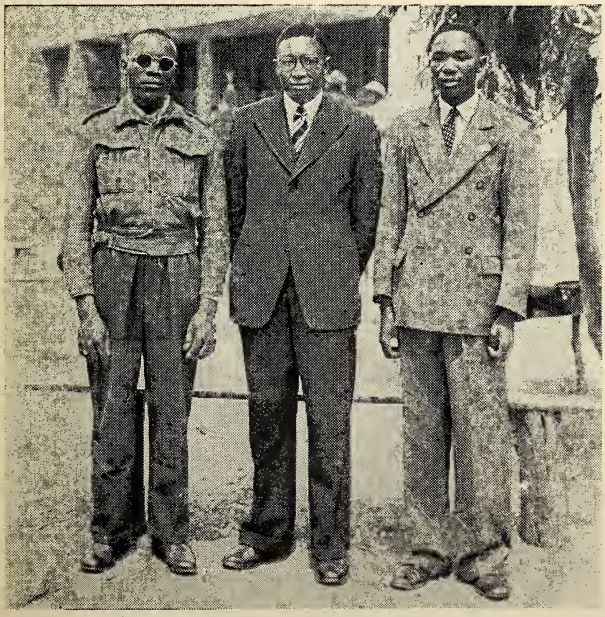
I advised his transfer to the Bantu Refuge where I visited him with three European deaf friends. To anyone conversant with the power of the hands to create scenes it was a vivid and wonderful experience. Little by little the whole picture of his life on the farm was formed, and the day he left with his boss, several other workers, ox wagons and so on; the out-spanning as night fell, the meal round the fire, and then sleep, each one rolled in a blanket in his chosen shelter; the next morning, his awakening, the deserted camp site, embers of the fire still glowing, the marks on the ground showing the bustle and confusion of departure during which our deaf friend was entirely forgotten. The terror of the moment came back into his features as his whole body moved with the signs describing his frantic search down to the main road, and then this way and that, then the wearisome walk untill the outskirts of the city were reached.

How could one explain to him that he should have stayed put as doubtless someone was sent back for him when he was missed. There he was, a man without a name, homeless and lost in the Golden City, and so far as I know he is still in the Refuge.

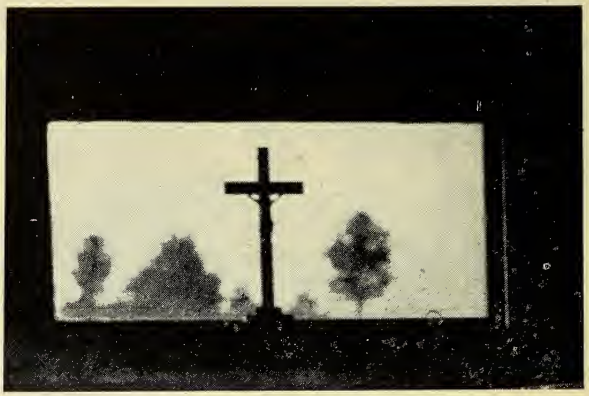
The numbers of such cases increased. We employed one or two in the Kitchen and grounds at Ezenzeleni, but the deaf and the blind do not easily mix, there is no common bond. So at last in desperation I persuaded the Deaf and Dumb Association to purchase an adjoin-



ATHLONE SCHOOL CHILDREN SPEND A DAY AT EZENZELENI



ST. DUNSTANERS AND THEIR TEACHER



THE CHAPEL WINDOW

A CORNER OF THE VILLAGE OF THE BLIND

ing farm which was for sale and there a school for such lads has been built, the first section being opened at the end of September 1946 by J. H. Hofmeyer who was at the time Acting Prime Minister. The School is an independant entity, with its own Management, but we are close neighbours.

(2) *Multiple Handicaps.* I wrote above that there is no common bond between the blind and the deaf, but there is one meeting ground. Thank God the number of people who are both deaf and blind is few, but because they are generally to be found among the poorest section of the community it does not occasion surprise that we have met several in the course of our work. The story of Radcliffe Dhladhla, the deaf-blind Zulu who has been with us over ten years, has been told in most of the papers of South Africa. Although his progress along the path of understanding has been as fast as can be expected in view of the difficulties which have hampered his teachers, still we await the day when he will tell his own story and so reveal once again what goes on in the mind of one who is deprived of the two major senses, sight and hearing which an American research officer said are the media for 70 per cent of the contacts an ordinary person has with the world around.

Since the opening of the Palmer Hostel other cases have come to our notice, although mercifully the tragic plight of most of them has been mitigated. Johannes, who is totally deaf and dumb has only one eye which possesses about 1 per cent of vision. Frans whose hearing has improved 50 per cent but whose poor visual acuity still keeps him in the blind category—in addition he has endured all the pain of nearly two years medical treatment while a tubercular hip was straightened. Now at 20 years of age he can begin to learn something.

In addition to the deaf-blind there are those who are blind and epileptic, blind and feeble minded, or merely just generally undeveloped. Alas, some of them are mere children who were sent to the Athlone School but have been discharged as unable to learn—now they are living in misery at home. We are keeping a register of those unable to stay at Ezenzeleni longing for the day when there will also be a suitable home for them.

(3) *Inter-racial and inter-denominational opportunities.* It is doubtful whether there is another organization in the Union which functions in such happy disregard of all the barriers which

cause so many difficulties in our land. Our first Chairman was a Presbyterian Minister, Dr. J. Lennox. On his death Ds. C. B. Brink, a leading Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church was elected and still guides our Board which is truly representative of all sections of South African life.

Ezenzeleni itself is the happy centre for many gatherings, conferences, picnics and casual visits. Here we forget our differences by mutual application to the task of relieving distress and encouraging strugglers along the way of victory.

In the centre of our grounds is a simple Chapel dedicated in 1942 by a service conducted by our Chairman (Dutch Reformed Church), an African Methodist Minister, and the Bishop of Johannesburg. Attendance at prayers is completely voluntary and visiting Ministers of all denominations are welcome.

With a view to developing a sense of responsibility in life, the chief items of news are read daily at the morning assembly. We possess a fine wireless set which is much appreciated by a small nucleus of "intelligentsia". Classes are held every evening for the exercise of mind and body, while Saturday evenings are usually given over to games and dancing. In all these activities care is taken to be realistic leaving our blind people to think out for themselves the problems of living together.

In plans for the future this aspect of work cannot be reduced to carefully calculated estimates, but those who know what a full life is will realize that spiritual work also must have some financial help, so we look forward to the day when a generous friend will endow a cultural centre as part of the spiritual life of Ezenzeleni; to house the Braille Library presented by Walter Cohen and his friends, and to include a class room for those who wish to study privately, and above all to symbolize that while the learning of a trade must occupy most of our blind people's time, they come to Ezenzeleni for something far greater than that.

Over our Chapel are inscribed in Greek the words from the book of Revelation, chapter 11 verse 15, "The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our God and of his Christ."

I am sometimes asked why the words are in Greek, but the answer is difficult to give because only those who appreciate the aorist meaning of "egeneto" can understand.

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